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BEGINNINGS OF ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE.

PART I.

The experimental nature of the policy of Elizabeth and her councillors is conspicuous at the opening of her reign. Ancient precedents were obsolete, old relations sundered; new times demanded new measures; a new system was to be created. Hence an air of uncertainty, of hazard, is apparent throughout the earlier years, indeed the larger part of the reign. The statesmanship of the time was tentative, extempore; it aimed only to deal with each emergency as it arose; no general rule was laid down save, tacitly, the constraining one of self-preservation: that was the common mainspring, the true centre round which all those sleights of subtle policy revolved. England was like a ship cut loose from old moorings and voyaging, like one of her own heroic captains, through strange, untraversed seas. Then began for her that attitude of isolation characteristic of her history in modern times, and essential to the perfecting of her nationality. It was his realization of this isolation and its attendant dangers that determined Sir William Cecil's ministry. The old ties with the continent were broken; the alternative of a French or Spanish alliance was no longer offered; Elizabeth made peace with France — but French support of the pretensions of Mary Stuart soon roused her resentment; and in the background loomed up ever more awfully the menace of Spain. Even Portugal, her friend of old — but soon to be swallowed up by Spain — was growing jealous of England's naval progress. The peculiar character of the English reformation precluded alliance with German protestants; but if that reformation parted England thus from the continent, at home it had compensating advantages: it effected what the power of Edward I. could never do; it broke down the Scottish wall of partition. The reformation terminated the historic connection between France and Scotland and opened a way for the unification

of the island kingdoms. The logic of the situation is conclusively shown by the alliance that Elizabeth was forced to strike, sorely against her will, with Scotch Presbyterians and iconoclasts.

The principal interest of the reign was internal, ecclesiastical. While discarding her sister's policy Elizabeth would have preferred to return to her father's royal supremacy together with sacerdotal celibacy and an ornate ritual associated with the mass. But that position had proved to be untenable, so she was constrained to adopt her brother's. Just as in civil affairs she selected as her chief adviser Cecil, who had been secretary of state in her brother's reign, so for her ecclesiastical minister she chose Matthew Parker, who had risen to prominence at the same period. Confusion reigned in the church, hard problems pressed on every side; there was added cause to regret the cruel deaths of tried and influential men like Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley; had they been alive the weight of their authority and example would have steadied the church. The royal supremacy was re-asserted, Edward's articles of religion, with a few omissions, were adopted as the standard of doctrine, and his Second Book was taken as the basis of the liturgy. The sentences appointed to be used in each of his books in administering the bread and wine were combined in the new form—an act emblematic of the whole system. Comprehension was the motive of the queen's government, a church inclusive of all the people her ideal; the idea of toleration, shortly to be worked out in France and Holland, was obnoxious to her.

The enforcement of the queen's supremacy drove from their livings those who held to the pope's, but it is remarkable how few these were. Paucity of number, however, was made up for by character and influence; of the two hundred clergy who sacrificed their livings to their convictions fully half held positions of eminence as bishops, abbots, deans, prebends, archdeacons. The loss of so much life-blood was injurious to the health of the church; it

meant the draining away of the principle of church authority ; and the establishment became Calvinistic in doctrine and Erastian in government. The political leaders, Cecil, Knollys, Walsingham, Leicester, whether from principle or merely to serve their own interest were all what would be termed low churchmen. Many of the Marian bishops had died of an epidemic, Pole being one ; Bonner and another were cast into prison, and the rest with a solitary exception descended to private life or passed beyond sea ; thus of the heads of the church a clean sweep was made. Of the new bishops, beside Parker, Grindal, Sandys and Jewel were the most prominent. Jewel was the apologist of the Elizabethan church : he composed a famous defense of its position and in a Lenten sermon made a public challenge to papists which they were unable to answer.

In public worship the utmost variety of usage was practised. In the queen's chapel a crucifix and candles stood on the altar ; elsewhere the altars were replaced by tables, and crucifixes and statues were destroyed. In Grindal's diocese of London the churches were purged, of their relics and ornaments bonfires were built, the figures blazoned on their walls were washed over and gospel texts painted on them instead. The queen found it necessary to issue a proclamation against further demolition of monuments, tombs, images, and windows of painted glass. In Scotland destruction of buildings as well as of statues marked the progress of Knox in his vehement preaching against idolatry. Many of the English clergy objected to the use of organs. The vestments in use at the beginning of Edward's reign were allowed and in some places worn, while in others they were made into gowns by the ministers' wives, the ministers reading the service in their everyday garb. The service was rendered in various parts of the church, by some in the chancel, by others in the pulpit, facing the people. At communion unleavened bread continued to be used though leavened was more common, the commonest cups sometimes served for chalices, and

basins for baptismal fonts. Such irregularities offended the queen's sense of order and propriety; she upbraided the bishops with their remissness; and amid her efforts to enforce uniformity the puritan party emerged.

The greatest literary monument of the first decade, indeed of the first half of her reign is Bishop Jewel's "Apology of the Church of England" — a learned and able work. In its original Latin form it was widely disseminated over Europe, and it was translated into several languages. Jewel formed his style upon that of Erasmus, whose writings he had assimilated and whose influence he always confessed, — evidence of the fact that the English reformation was conducted along Erasmian lines. Immediately after its appearance in 1562, the Lady Ann, wife of Sir Nicholas and mother of Francis Bacon, and foremost among a number of highly educated Englishwomen, prepared a version of the "Apology" in the vernacular.

The bishop's motive was to defend the establishment against the charge of innovation: "God's holy gospel, the ancient bishops and the primitive church do make on our side." He sets forth the orthodox doctrine and catholic polity of the Anglican church, and reviews the main points in the controversy with Rome.

"We receive and embrace all the canonical Scriptures . . . — the heavenly voices whereby God hath opened unto us his will. Only in them can man's heart have settled rest; in them be abundantly and fully comprehended all things needful for our salvation; they be the very sure and infallible rule whereby may be tried whether the church do stagger or err, and whereunto all ecclesiastical doctrine ought to be called to account . . . we make our prayers in that tongue which all our people, as meet is, may understand . . . We affirm that by [bread and wine] Christ himself is so given unto us as that by faith we verily receive his body and blood. Yet say we not this so as though we thought that the nature and substance

of the bread and wine is clearly changed and goeth to nothing, as many have dreamed in these later times. Christ's meaning was that he might rather change and transform us into his body . . . We justly blame the bishops of Rome who without the word of God, without the authority of the holy fathers, without any example of antiquity, after a new guise, set before the people the sacramental bread to be worshipped as God . . . Their purgatory is no better than an old wives' device — yet of this one error hath there grown up a harvest of mass-mongers, the temples of God become shops to get money . . . They do not only wickedly but also shamefully call upon the blessed Virgin, Christ's mother, to have her remember that she is the mother, and to command her son . . . Christ hath given to his ministers power to bind, to loose, to open, to shut — not that they should hear the private confessions of the people and listen to their whisperings, as massing-priests do everywhere, but to the end they should teach, should publish abroad the gospel . . . We say that matrimony is holy and honorable in all sorts and states of persons . . . — Cardinal Campegius and others have taught that the priest which "keepeth a concubine" doth live more holily and chastely than he which hath a "wife in matrimony" . . . We say that the bishop of Rome hath no more jurisdiction over the church of God than the rest of the patriarchs, either of Alexandria or of Antiochia have . . . All bishops be of like preëminence and of like priesthood."

John Foxe, whose famous "Book of Martyrs" appeared the year after Jewel's "Apology," has likewise the credit of setting forth the historic continuity of the church of England. The moral of his great work is the indefeasible right of conscience. It is interesting to discover that insistence upon the antiquity of the Anglican church, and the thesis that its reformation was simply a reversion to primitive models, led to an ecclesiastical revival of Anglo-Saxon. Foxe studied it and was aided by Archbishop Parker, who republished Ælfric's homily on the Lord's Supper.

At this time John Stowe produced his "Summary of English Chronicles," which ran through eleven editions in the course of the reign.

The removal of Sir John Cheke affected English scholarship as that of Cranmer and Latimer did the church: it left classical letters without an eminent head. Cheke's successors were men of mediocre talent, save one who was most loyal to his memory — Roger Ascham, Elizabeth's tutor in Greek. Ascham figures as the one link of Elizabethan letters with the past. His "Schoolmaster" sprang from a talk about teaching had with Cecil and Sir Richard Sackville in the year 1563: the latter asked him to set down in writing the points he had made. In his book he unfolded his method of learning a language and his ideal of a teacher, denounced the prevalent practice of whipping children to make them study, and discoursed much by the way of modern manners, descanting on the pernicious influence of the Italian Circe. The motive of the work was the "institution" of an ideal youth and scholar. An affecting passage is his picture of the poor young Lady Jane Grey.

"The scholar is commonly beat for the making [of Latin] when the master were more worthy to be beat for the mending or rather the marring of the same . . . Love is fitter than fear, gentleness better than beating, to bring up a child rightly in learning . . . For whatever the mind doth learn unwillingly with fear the same it doth quickly forget without care.

"Before I went into Germany I came to Broadgate in Leicestershire, to take my leave of that noble Lady Jane Grey, to whom I was exceeding much beholding. Her parents the duke and the duchess, with all the household, gentlemen and gentlewomen, were hunting in the park. I found her in her chamber reading 'Phaedon Platonis' in Greek, and that with as much delight as some gentlemen would read a merry tale in Boccace. After salutation and duty done, with some other talk, I asked her why she

would lose such pastime in the park? Smiling she answered me, 'I wist all their sport in the park is but a shadow to that pleasure that I find in Plato. Alas! good folk, they never felt what true pleasure meant.' 'And how came you, madam,' quoth I, 'to this deep knowledge of pleasure, and what did chiefly allure you unto it, seeing not many women but very few men have attained thereunto?' 'I will tell you,' quoth she, 'and tell you a truth which perchance ye will marvel at. One of the greatest benefits that ever God gave me is that he sent me so sharp and severe parents and so gentle a schoolmaster. For when I am in presence of either father or mother, whether I speak, keep silence, sit, stand or go, eat, drink, be merry or sad, be sewing, playing, dancing or doing anything else, I must do it as it were in such weight, measure and number even so perfectly as God made the world or else I am so sharply taunted, so cruelly threatened, yea, presently sometimes with pinches, nips and bobs and other ways which I will not name for the honor I bear them so without measure misordered that I think myself in hell till time come that I must go to M. Elmer, who teacheth me so gently, so pleasantly, with such fair allurements to learning, that I think all the time nothing whilst I am with him. And when I am called from him I fall on weeping, because whatsoever I do else but learning is full of grief, trouble, fear and whole misliking unto me. And thus my book hath been so much my pleasure and bringeth daily to me more pleasure and more that in respect of it all other pleasures in very deed be but trifles and troubles unto me.' I remember this talk gladly, both because it is so worthy of memory and because also it was the last talk that ever I had and the last time that ever I saw that noble and worthy lady."

Ascham admits as "comely and decent" pastimes archery, tennis and the chase, running, vaulting, wrestling and swimming, the dance and song, "and all pastimes generally which be joined with labor, used in open place, and

on the daylight containing either some fit exercise for war or some pleasant pastime for peace." He declaims in puritan vein against "garish colors" and extremes of fashion in apparel, and cautions fathers against allowing their sons to travel too freely in Italy. The charge he makes is that most young men return thence sceptics and libertines. Italy has degenerated in manners and morals, learning and religion; like Circe she turns her victims into beasts. He affords valuable testimony to the rise of a class of young sophists, "English Italians, marvellous singular in all their matters; singular in knowledge, ignorant of nothing. They boldly laugh to scorn both protestant and papist; they care for no scripture, they condemn the consent of the church; they mock the pope, they rail on Luther, they allow neither side. They have in more reverence the triumphs of Petrarch than the genesis of Moses; they make more account of Tully's offices than St. Paul's epistles, of a tale in Boccaccio than a story of the bible. They count as fables the holy mysteries of Christian religion." The huge European schism, the acrimonious controversies in England were beginning to do their work, were breeding a generation of sceptics. The bearing of this upon the progress of letters is made luminous by the above quotation: the great English renaissance was preparing. Ascham attributes much of this corruption to "fond books of late translated out of Italian into English, sold in every shop in London," and falls foul of the "Morte d' Arthur" as a school of manslaughter and adultery!—"and yet ten Morte Arthurs do not the tenth part so much harm as one of these books made in Italy and translated in England. Ten sermons at Paul's cross do not so much good for moving men to true doctrine as one of these books do harm with enticing men to ill living." He flings out by the way at the barbarous trick of "rude beggarly rhyming, brought first into Italy by Goths and Huns, and at last received into England by men of excellent wit indeed but of small learning and less judgment in that behalf."

Ascham died in 1568. The following year appeared an anonymous puritan attack upon the queen's young choristers and players: "her majesty's unfledged minions, flaunting in silks and satins. They had as well be at their popish service in devil's garments . . . Even in her majesty's chapel do these pretty upstart youths profane the Lord's day by the lascivious writhing of their tender limbs and gorgeous decking of their apparel in feigning bawdy fables gathered from the idolatrous heathen poets."

Such protests were powerless to stay the rising tide of humanism in England. The pageants presented before the virgin queen were rife with classical mythology. Despite Ascham, translation from the Italian increased in volume. The young Arthur Brooke had produced a highly popular metrical version of the tale of Romeo and Juliet, from Matteo Bandello, and in 1567 Geoffrey Fenton, an accomplished linguist, translated all his novels. The same year appeared Turberville's translation of Mantuan's Latin eclogues. Gascoigne had just published his version of a comedy by Ariosto, "*I Suppositi*," and a famous collection of nearly a hundred tales was now out in two volumes — William Paynter's "*Palace of Pleasure*" — a work of momentous import for the coming drama. By the wide range of its sources, both classic and renascent, it registers the progress of the literary awakening: Herodotus and Plutarch, Livy, Tacitus and Aulus Gellius were laid under contribution and among the moderns Guevara, Cinthio (secretary to the reigning duke of Ferrara), Boccaccio and the *Heptameron*, the latter supplying sixteen tales each, but especially Bandello, from whom twenty-six were drawn.

One by one Seneca's tragedies were being translated by various hands and Virgil's *Aeneid* was versed in English. So too were Ovid's epistles by Turberville in 1567; and that year Arthur Golding followed his recent translation of Cæsar's *Commentaries* with one of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In a preface to the latter Golding apologizes, in deference to puritan opinion, for having to name so many heathen gods, and explains that

"The true and everliving God the Paynims did not know,
Which caused them the name of gods on creatures to bestow."

Why then give currency, it might be retorted, to such idolatrous fables? To afford his readers, he replies, a *mirror* to see themselves withal good examples, inventions, counsels and reproofs of vice.

It is somewhat remarkable that among these translators were to be found clergy of the puritanic Grindal: Thomas Drant, who put forth a poor rendering of Horace's satires, was his chaplain, and William Paynter was ordered deacon by him.

The most distinguished Latinist by far in Britain was George Buchanan, in whom Scottish humanism, such as it was, culminated. He had studied at Paris and afterward taught there and at Bordeaux, where Michel de Montaigne was among his pupils. Thence he was called to the great Portuguese university at Coimbra, but being pestered by the Jesuits returned to Paris and finally, in 1562, to Edinburgh. There he brought out a Latin satire, sketched some time before, upon the Franciscan friars. He read Latin with Mary Stuart, but after her union with Bothwell went to England to lay charges against her before Elizabeth. Here he made Ascham's acquaintance. He returned to Scotland to become tutor to the little King and to compile his great history of his country, in twenty books. Crichton, the Scottish Pico, was a young contemporary of his.

Turning next to Elizabethan verse we are impressed by the profound gloom in which it begins: a gloom only to be explained by the apprehensions with which the minds of Englishmen were filled. The dark vestibule to the glorious palace of Elizabethan poetry is the "Induction to the Mirror for Magistrates" by Thomas Sackville, son of Ascham's friend. It is an impressive poem and narrowly misses greatness, — but for that its imitation of the opening of Dante's *Inferno* is too pronounced; it has too much the air of a formal exercise. Its furies are lay figures: to demonstrate this it is merely necessary to compare them

with Dunbar's *Deadly Sins*. It abounds in alliteration. Its method and idea are mediæval,—evidence this of the delicate transitions of history. The poet pictures the approach of winter and with copious astronomical detail, in true mediæval fashion, lets us know that the time was the middle of December. As he was musing on that favorite theme—the changes of fortune, the falls of mighty men—he was encountered by the hag Sorrow who offered to be his guide through hell that he might view the bitter bale of some who once were great upon the earth. They pass its gates, and many melancholy and forbidding figures: Remorse, “tormented with the tedious thought of those detested crimes which she had wrought,” ghastly Dread, pale and dead for fear, fell Revenge, pining Misery, Sleep, death's cousin, “and of our life in earth the better part,” wretched Old Age, doting on past pleasure, Disease, grisly Famine, gnawing her own bones, Death the corpse and War with all his horrors; on his shield were blazoned images of fallen greatness—Darius, Hannibal, Pompey, the ruin of Thebes and Tyre but chiefly of Troy. The poet and his guide then passed to the bank of Acheron, over which they were ferried by Charon—“and with the unwonted weight the rusty keel began to crack.” Among the swarming shades on the further side appeared the hapless Henry, Duke of Buckingham—and with his legend Sackville opened the *Mirror for Magistrates*. The key-note of the work is thus struck; its purpose was to hold up a “glass of brittle state, woeful mirrors of wretched chance,” as a cause for reflection to rulers. So it links on to Lydgate's version of Boccaccio's “*Falls of Princes*”—of which indeed it professed to be an English continuation: most of its subjects therefore fall in the fifteenth century. It throws a flood of light upon the Elizabethan drama, explaining for instance why the series of Shakspeare's historical plays runs from Richard II to Henry VIII. To statesmen, moreover, the troublous era of the Wars of the Roses seemed full of warnings at a time when the question

of succession was again uppermost: to settle it Parliament repeatedly importuned the queen to marry, to her great displeasure. The "Mirror" was a popular, almost a national work; it gathered bulk with years, ran through many editions, employed many pens, and proved that stuff for poetry could be extracted from chronicles like Stow's. Its themes were the fate of Tresilian, Richard II., Henry Percy, James I., Humphrey of Gloucester, Suffolk, Cade, Clifford, Warwick and Henry VI., Clarence, Hastings, Jane Shore, and Richard III., James IV. and Wolsey, after whom it fell back upon Geoffrey of Monmouth, giving the legends of "Queen Cordila," Ferrex and Porrex, the mythic Uther and his son.

The story of the unnatural strife of the brothers Ferrex and Porrex had been already told in dramatic form by Sackville, with the coöperation of Thomas Norton: he turned to it indeed immediately after he had done his part in the "Mirror for Magistrates," and it was produced before the queen in 1562. Thus Sackville's name stands at the head of both the epic and dramatic strains in Elizabethan poetry, — honor enough for one life. The play is significant from several points of view; as the first English tragedy, the first English dramatic essay in blank verse; as showing renewed interest in Geoffrey of Monmouth, and as having like motive with the "Mirror" to exhibit, that is, the evils of disunion and war, especially civil war. It was a lesson, its author thought, for his own day. The kingdom has been divided, so the tale goes, between two princes; Ferrex, the elder, is his mother's favorite and is egged on by her to grasp all; in the struggle Porrex slays his brother and is forthwith stabbed by the furious queen; revolted by such unnatural crimes the people rise and kill both king and queen, upon which long wars ensue between them and the lords. The play, of course, is archaic, its verse is stiff, its passions are turgid — but like some old Apollo of Solon's time it has the promise of better things; it is enacted in the sphere of the human and has the merit of inaugurating the grand departure from the supernatural and allegorical abstractions of mediæval drama.

Its moral was enforced again four years later by Gascoigne, with the collaboration of Kinwelmarsh, in his "Jocasta," a rendering of a free Italian rendering from Euripides and the second tragedy in English blank verse. As in the former instance the verse is set: the cæsura falls regularly after the fourth or sixth syllables, the lines and speeches are almost all end-stopped, the quicker dialogue being conducted in alternate lines. The correspondence in motive is equally striking; the fraternal strife of Eteocles and Polynices being the analogue of that of Sackville's heroes.

Another playwright, Richard Edwards, director of the queen's entertainments, illustrated the blessings of concord in his "Damon and Pythias." It is noteworthy that the epoch by its many contrasts, religious, political, intellectual, social, afforded just the necessary conditions for the rise of drama.

The realistic counterpart to these tales of high-strung passion is supplied by John Still's rustic comedy, "Gammer Gurton's Needle,"—the first of its kind after "Roister Doister." While scaring the cat from the milk-pan Gammer has lost her one and only needle. Her man Hodge, who wants his breeches mended, searches for it in vain. Diccon, the mischief-maker of the piece, tells Gammer that neighbor Chat picked up the precious "neelee," and meantime tells Dame Chat that Gammer believes that she has stolen and roasted her cock: the encounter of the irate crew can be better imagined than described. Dr. Rat, the vicar, is sent for to reconcile the parties: he is found in an ale-shop. (This worthy specimen of an Elizabethan country parson receives contemptuous treatment throughout.) Diccon tells him how he can creep into Chat's house by night and see her patching with the "neelee;" he then reports to Chat that Hodge is coming that way after dark to steal a hen; result, the vicar gets his head broken. The quarrel is now carried to the bailiff and there is a general clearance of the social atmosphere, when, to Gammer's delight, Hodge is made aware of the presence of the needle in his breeches.

In bucolic verse we note the eclogues of Barnaby Googe and in lyric the verses of Gascoigne and Turbervile, pretty generally divided between the twin themes of love and death. The removal of the young Earl of Surrey was a grievous blow to letters; had he been spared he would have been in the meridian of his powers when Elizabeth succeeded to the throne, and his influence and the inspiration of his example would have been highly beneficial to poetic art. As it was, his pieces in Tottell's popular anthology served as guide and incentive to later verse-writers. Turbervile composed some lines in his praise for improving English, for his excellent life, and for being a nobleman. Such panegyric, with "funeral verses," epitaphs and love poems, artificial, replete with frigid mythological and classical allusions, make up the bulk of Turbervile's verse. His most successful effort is a piece "In Praise of Anne, Countess Warwick," to whose perfection when Nature failed all the gods contributed. Too much of his verse is in "The elephant now goes round" style, much affected in his day but to our mind mean and of appalling tedium; a ballad style like that of the Babes in the Wood, but printed in couplets each of a twelve and a fourteen syllabled line.

Beside Sackville, George Gascoigne was without question the representative poet of the first indiction of the reign. He had studied at Cambridge and the Inns of Court, and travelled in his own land and in France. There is a report that he was disinherited by his father for his extravagance and dissipation; it is certain that he was given to gambling and that he ran through some fortune. In reparation he married a rich widow. He sought to enter Parliament, but was charged with moral worthlessness and atheism: his was not a character to please the puritans, then steadily gaining political strength. Thus baffled he left his ungrateful country for a time and took part in the Dutch war of independence: his conclusion drawn from this chapter of his experience was that war is the scourge of God and only sweet to such as know it not. He published a collection of

his pieces in which he classified them as Flowers (love poems, mostly of a style later dubbed "metaphysical,") Herbs ("profitable" pieces, moral discourses,) and Weeds (some of which, he said, are yet medicinal.) He had a late passion ; he warns his unknown flame that his wife's jealous eye is ever upon them. Such an experience may have occasioned his analysis, in a vein we are already familiar with, of the troublous state of a lover :

Amid my bale I bathe in bliss,
I swim in heaven, I sink in hell :
I find amends for every miss
And yet my moan no tongue can tell.
I live and love — what would you more? —
As never lover lived before.

I laugh sometimes with little lust,
So jest I oft and feel no joy :
Mine eye is builded all on trust
And yet mistrust breeds mine annoy
I live and lack, I lack and have,
I have and miss the thing I crave.

GREENOUGH WHITE.